



GRASSLAND MANAGEMENT FOR WILDLIFE HABITAT (647) Biology Job Sheet #3

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) - Minnesota

WHAT IS GRASSLAND MANAGEMENT?

Grassland management is used to develop and maintain grassland habitats in prairie, transition and forested regions of Minnesota. This practice improves habitat for certain species such as greater prairie chicken, sharp-tailed grouse, waterfowl and grassland dependent songbirds.



REQUIREMENTS

Knowing what you have, what you want, and developing a plan to improve your habitat is the essence of a successful project. The design, layout, and timing of grassland management varies with the intended purpose. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) or Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) can assist in inventorying your property and developing a specific project plan.

MANAGEMENT

Grasslands may be managed by one, or a combination of the following methods. No more than 1/3-1/2 of a field should be disturbed at any given management period.

Mechanical: includes mowing or light disking. Mechanical disturbance should be done prior to the primary nesting season (May 1) or between August 1 - September 1 to protect ground nesting wildlife.

Mowing

- Where possible, manage no more than 50% of the stand in any given year in 4-5 year increments, or in strips to maintain cover.

Rotate mowed strips across the field. Mow cool season grasses no shorter than 6". Native warm season grasses should be mowed no shorter than 10".

- Strip mowing can be applied in the spring prior to the nesting season to encourage vegetative diversity without greatly impacting ground nesting activities or loss of fall food plants.
- Minimum standing strip width shall be 100'.

Light Disking

- Light disking (2-4" deep) of existing stands, typically greater than 4 years old, may be necessary to increase the amount of open ground and encourage a diverse plant community of annuals and perennials.
- Alternate disked strips of $\leq 75'$ in width, with standing buffer strips a minimum 2 times the disked width, across the field on the contour or across slope.
- Rotate the disked strips across the field.

Prescribed Burning:

If the area is not mowed or grazed, grass stands may need periodic renovation to remove excess litter which may reduce the quality of wildlife habitat.

Controlled fire can allow germination of seed bearing annuals, increase plant species diversity, control unwanted woody vegetation, and open up the stand for movement of small animals and birds.

- Frequency of burning should generally not exceed once every 4-5 years.
- Fall burns and early spring burns tend to favor wildflowers. Late spring burns provide maximum stimulus to warm season plants and work well to control cool season grasses and brush.
- Burning can only be done under an approved burn plan prepared by qualified personnel. Check with your local MDNR wildlife manager or forester about required permits.
- See NRCS practice standard PRESCRIBED BURNING (338) for additional recommendations.

Prescribed Grazing:

Domestic livestock may be used to manipulate plant succession. This manipulation may be beneficial to maintaining the quality of herbaceous cover, and controlling brush when done in accordance with a prescribed grazing plan with wildlife as the primary objective.

- This technique requires very careful management to assure the site is not over grazed.
- Do not recommend this technique unless assured that the land user fully understands

the grazing system, and is capable of managing the system.

- A grazing plan should be developed at a “light grazing intensity”. See practice standard PRESCRIBED GRAZING (528).

Chemicals:

Selected herbicides can be used to effectively manipulate plant succession, control bush, reduce plant competition, control exotic weeds, and improve habitat diversity.

- Careful planning and care in application are required in the use of chemicals to improve existing habitat. Selection of a product shall be based on several factors, including: (a) product effectiveness, (b) non-target species impacts, (c) toxicological risks, and d) off-site movements of chemicals.
- Chemicals are to be applied only for the uses listed on the container label. Follow all directions and precautions.



Site Specific Comments and Recommendations

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